

Holy Week Reflections - Maundy Thursday

John 13: 13-15: "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

Reflection

Jesus says a lot of annoying things like this. They are annoying because they prevent me from just looking out for myself. In the same vein, Jesus says to Peter *'If any of you want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross to follow me'*.

It is a virtue that goes beyond just being 'kind' – that great standard Christian behaviour. Sam Wells sums up the cross as: *'not just the moment when we see the truth of who we are. It's also the moment that we see the truth of who God is'*.

I wonder whether Jesus had been reflecting on his experience of having his feet washed with hair and perfume. Although it was a common occurrence in first century Palestine, the act has clearly made a mark on Jesus. He takes it and sets us a model of development, addition, and innovation in response to the needs we see – or don't see directly- around us.

R.S. Thomas wrote: *'We have over-furnished our faith. Our churches are as limousines in the procession towards heaven. But the verities remain: a de-nuclearised cross, uncontaminated by our coinage; the chalice's ichor; and one crumb of bread on the tongue for the bird-like intelligence to be made tame by'*.

Those were the things that I missed when we were told that church buildings had to close. I can also understand – a tiny bit better - how Christians that can't meet publicly feel a lot of the time.

Partly, that is why it is always so powerful when we strip the altar on Maundy Thursday. We take it right back to basics. A table, bread and wine, different people drawn together around a teacher and Lord.

Still, our opportunity is to notice what we missed, and see what we value, when it is denied to us for the moment. We are seeing this in many other areas of our lives too – faith and church should be no different. We deliberately take away all the trappings to focus on what is important.

We literally take it away to see what will come out of the other side. As a result we can examine our perspective on what we are doing. This is a gift as Sam Wells describes: *'Jesus is forging a path that we can follow. The closer we stay to him, the nearer we come to life'*.

Elaine Gisbourne wrote the following prayer which seems appropriate for the world today: *'When there are no answers, only confusion, and the shadows threaten to overwhelm, may we remember the words of the meal we share together: 'Do this in remembrance of me''*.

Action

There is no pressure, but we have a wonderful chance to show intimacy. Foot washing can be a nerve-wracking thing in a church service, but now we are in the privacy of our homes, the act of washing each other's hands with those closest to us – something out of the ordinary – may be more comfortable. You could always indulge yourself with a bath (feet, hands or all of you!) as well!